

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



EDUCATION BENEFITS UPDATE

A new rule took effect in August requiring many Post-9/11 GI Bill users to verify their school attendance with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs each month before receiving any payments. Starting this December, that requirement will be expanded to all Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients.

Users of all other GI Bill programs, such as the Montgomery GI Bill, have long been required to verify their school attendance each month. And if they didn't verify their attendance, they don't get any money!

Beginning immediately, GI Bill users who are attending a technical school, also known as a "non-college degree," must verify their school attendance with the VA each month in order to receive their monthly housing allowance.

For most students, this will be done via text message.

After enrolling in courses, students will receive a text message from the VA inviting them to enroll in text message verification. They can reply "Yes" to opt in.

At the end of each month, students will receive a text from the VA asking whether they are still enrolled in classes. If they respond affirmatively, their monthly housing allowance will be sent to their bank at the beginning of the following month.

Those who fail to verify their attendance with the VA for two months in a row will have their housing allowance payments withheld until they do so.

If students don't receive the text message, don't opt into the service or don't have a mobile phone, they will be required to contact the VA by calling the GI Bill hotline at 888-442-4551 to receive payment.

Currently, this change applies only to technical school students; however, the VA is planning to roll out the verification process to all Post-9/11 GI Bill students by Dec. 17. All affected students should be notified by the VA before this requirement begins.

As always, if you have any questions regarding this change or any education benefits, please reach out to Shane Olivier at 605-773-3648 or email him at shane.olivier@state.sd.us. (Information for this articles was provided by Military.com).

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MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AVAILABLE IN SOUTH DAKOTA

As Mental Illness Awareness Week kicks off, the South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS) wants South Dakotans to know there is help available for those dealing with mental health challenges.

"Mental health is vital to our overall health and well-being," said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill.

"Mental illness is treatable, and South Dakota has resources and support available for those who need it."

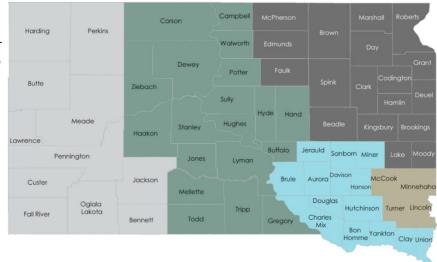
According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five adults in the United States experiences mental illness each year. Diagnosing mental illness can be difficult, but there are signs to watch for:

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks.
- Trying to harm or end one's life or making plans to do so.
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason.
- Significant weight loss or gain.
- Seeing, hearing or believing things that aren't real.
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs.
- Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality, or sleeping habits.
- Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still.
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these symptoms, it is important to talk to a health care professional, mental health provider, or crisis helpline. Crisis counseling services in South Dakota are availa-

ble 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. Services are available to anyone and all calls are completely confidential by dialing 1-800-273-8255 or text CONNECT to 741741. Additional resources are also available by visiting 605Strong.com or calling 211.

DSS contracts with 11 accredited community mental health centers across the state to provide services to both adults and youth. Services provided include screenings and assessments, specialized outpatient services, individual therapy, group therapy, and crisis intervention. Funding assistance may be available. To find a service provider in



your area, please visit dss.sd.gov/behavioralhealth/agencycounty.

Congress officially established the first full week of October as Mental Illness Awareness Week in 1990.

VETERANS LEGACY MEMORIAL EXPANDS TO INCLUDE VA-GRANT FUNDED CEMETERIES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs expanded the <u>Veterans Legacy Memorial</u> site this month to include individual pages for nearly 500,000 Veterans interred in 93 state, territorial and tribal Veterans cemeteries.

These pages join the nearly four million VLM pages already on the site memorializing veterans interred in the VA's 155 national cemeteries.

VLM offers family and friends a way to share lasting memories of a veteran by uploading written tributes, photos, biographies, documents, and other information to veterans' pages.

Welcome to the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM)

"VLM offers families a meaningful way to pay tribute to our veterans," said Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Matthew Quinn. "Because of the expansion of VLM to VA grant-funded State, Territorial and Tribal Veterans cemeteries, many families — including my own — will have the opportunity to memorialize their veterans online."

The 93 cemeteries which will have their veterans added to VLM are all recipients of VA grants through the <u>National Cemetery Administration's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program</u>. These cemeteries also use the same software program NCA uses to schedule and record interments in VA national cemeteries, which provides the foundation for each veteran's page in VLM.

"Memorializing our nation's veterans and providing their families with a way to honor and remember their service is important to every state and territory," said National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs president Thomas Palladino. "NASDVA is excited to see the National Cemetery Administration's sustained efforts to grow VLM and tell the stories of the men and women who served, and our members will continue to utilize and promote it in our state and tribal territories."

More than 22,000 submissions have been made to veteran's profile pages in VLM since the site launched in 2019. All content submitted to VLM is reviewed by NCA moderators before being posted to a veteran's page to ensure it conforms to the <u>VLM User Policy</u>.

For more information contact NCA's Chief of Digital Services at James.LaPaglia@va.gov.

VA RESUMES OVERPAYMENT NOTIFICATIONS, MEDICAL COPAYMENT COLLECTIONS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs will resume over-payment notifications for new benefit debts and the debts deferred from April 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, due to the COVID pandemic.

The VA suspended debt collection April 6, 2020, and will restart debt collection Oct. 1, 2021, however, the VA will not deduct debts from benefits payments until January 2022.

Collections on medical co-payments created prior to April 6, 2020, and on new medical co-payments will also resume Oct. 1, 2021.

Debt notification letters sent to affected veterans and beneficiaries will include options to request debt relief for those who continue to need financial relief from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The VA will continue to provide relief options such as extending repayment plans, waivers, and temporary hardship suspensions during these challenging times. It has been and will remain a priority of the Department to work individually with each veteran.

Veterans and beneficiaries with questions or requiring assistance on debt management can access the following resources:

- For benefit debt information, review frequently asked questions, submit requests <u>online</u> or call 1-800-827-0648.
- For medical care and pharmacy services copayment debt, contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238.
- Frequently asked questions can be viewed by clicking here FAQ.

PICKETT JOINS VSO NETWORK

Harding County has named Jim Pickett as their new county veterans service officer. Pickett will work Wednesdays from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (MT).

Jim can be reached at 605-210-2002 or emailed at: hcvso@sdplains.com.

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Jim to our veteran network.

LINCOLN BECOMES PURPLE HEART COUNTY

Lincoln County and the communities of Lennox, Canton and Harrisburg join the ranks of a Purple Heart County and Purple Heart Cities.

If your community or county is interested in becoming a Purple Heart city, county, or community, please contact Ken Teunissen with the Military Order of the Purple Heart.



CUTLER NAMED MJFSVH EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Chona Lendy Cutler was selected as the September 2021 "Employee of the Month" at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs. Cutler works in the nursing department and has been with the Home for five years.

"This is a new program for the Home," said Superintendent Brad Richardson. "We believe it will provide

better employee engagement and will enhance the campus culture, productivity, and retention."

Cutler was presented a certificate of recognition, a gift card, and will have a reserved parking space for the next month.

Chona always goes the extra mile for our residents and teammates," said Jeff Tarrell, Cutler's supervisor. "I can always count on her to do her best while working with our team."

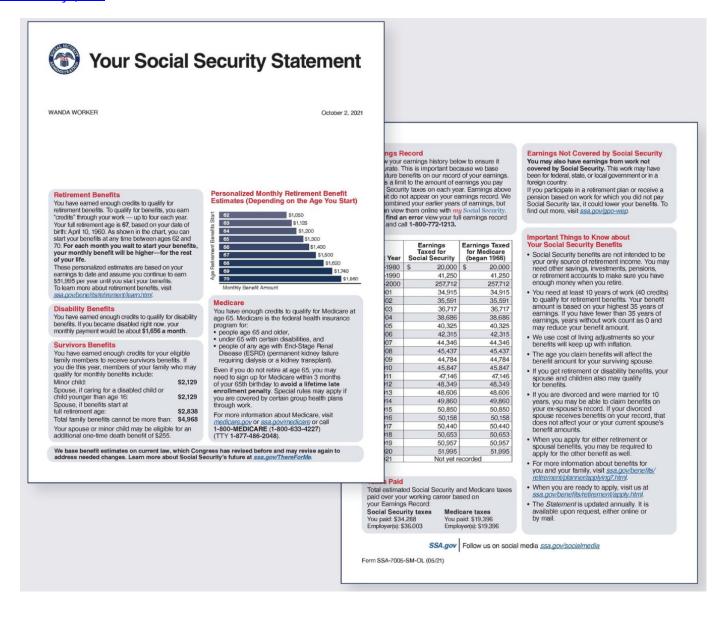


SOCIAL SECURITY REVAMPS STATEMENTS

The Social Security Administration announces that they have redesigned the Social Security Statements. The new statement is designed to make it easier for people to fund the information they need to plan their financial future.

A new bar chart feature displays the person's estimated retirement benefits for up to nine retirement start dates. Also new are text boxes that emphasize key facts people need for financial planning.

To learn more about the new statement visit My Social Security at: <u>Get Your Social Security Statement | my Social Security | SSA</u>.



STILES ASSUMES COMMAND OF 196TH MEB

Col. Phillip Stiles, of Rapid City, took command of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade during a change of command ceremony in Sioux Falls, Oct. 2.

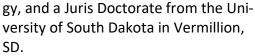
Stiles assumed command from Col. David Dailey, of Sturgis, who served in the position since March 2019. As commander, Stiles is responsible for the command and control of three battalions, which are comprised of 12 units totaling more than 1,600 soldiers in 15 communities throughout South Dakota. The 196th assists assigned units in meeting training, administrative, and logistical requirements to maintain the units' readiness in support of state and federal missions.

"I appreciate everyone's efforts, stepping up to the plate, and I could not have asked for a better group soldiers to lead," said Dailey. "I cannot wait to see what this unit accomplishes in the future."

"I want to thank Col. Dailey and all the other staff officers for setting me up for success in this command," said Stiles. "I will work as hard as I possibly can to make this unit successful."

Stiles joined the U.S. Army in 1986 as tank crewman and subsequently served in the Arkansas and Nebraska National Guard prior to joining the South Dakota National Guard in 1993. He received his commission

from the University of South Dakota. Col. Stiles education includes a Bachelor of Science of Science in Biolo-



Stiles is a licensed attorney in South Dakota and is the managing partner of Costello Porter Law Firm in Rapid City. Stiles is married to his wife, Jennifer, and they have two children, Ryan and Kayli.





SIEMONSMA TAKES COMMAND OF 109TH REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP

Col. Steve Siemonsma, of Rapid City, took command of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 109th Regional Support Group during a change of command ceremony at Camp Rapid, Oct. 2.

Siemonsma assumed command from Col. Jeffrey Norris, of Rapid City, who served in the position since April 2019. The 109th RSG provides command and control for two battalions, which are comprised of 16 units totaling more than 1,200 soldiers in nine communities throughout South Dakota. The 109th RSG assists assigned units in meeting training, administrative, and logistical requirements to maintain the units' readiness in support of state and federal missions.

"I am humbled, honored, and excited to be leading the 109th RSG as the next commander," Siemonsma said. "I couldn't think of a better command to take in this stage of my career."

"It's been an honor to serve in such an outstanding unit as the 109th RSG," Norris said. "I wish you all the best!"

Siemonsma began his military career in December 1995, enlisting into the 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion in Sioux Falls. He attended the Officer Candidate School at Fort Meade, gaining his commission in September 1998. During his staff time, he held positions in Joint Force Headquarters, 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 147th FA, and the Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

Siemonsma served as the battery commander for Bravo Battery, 2-147th FA, and served as the battalion



commander for both the Recruiting and Retention Battalion and the 1-147th FA Battalion. Siemonsma has been full time for the guard for 20 years serving in the following positions; officer strength manager, operations and training officer, legislative liaison, administrative officer for the 1-147th FA, deputy construction and facilities officer, the state training officer, and he is currently serving as the G4 director of logistics.

Siemonsma earned a Bachelor of Science in Sociology and minor in Criminal Justice from South Dakota State University in 1996. He earned a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College in 2021. Siemonsma has four children; Hanna, Holli, Holden, and Hadley.

VA ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AND INDIAN AFFAIRS APPOINTEES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs appointed its first-ever Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs Oct. 4.

The committee will provide advice and guidance to the VA Secretary on all matters relating to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and Native American Veterans.

American Indians, Native Hawaiians and Alaska Natives have a rich legacy of service in the U.S. Armed Forces and have served with distinction in every major conflict for more than 200 years. There are approximately 160,000 AI/NH/AN Veterans across the country.

"This committee gives tribal leaders as well as American Indian, Native Hawaiians and Alaska Native Veterans a place at the table with the highest levels of leadership within the VA," said Office of Tribal Government Relations Director Stephanie Birdwell. "It offers an unprecedented voice in how programs, policies and services may be delivered and provided."

Committee members are appointed to two- to three-year terms. The initial 15 members and areas of representation are:

- Adam Archuleta (Albuquerque Area)
- Jack Austin, Jr. (Member at Large)
- Jestin Dupree (Billings Area)
- Manaja Hill (Great Plains Area)
- Reyn Kaupiko (Native Hawaiian Organization)
- Nickolaus Lewis (Portland Area)
- Kevin Meeks (Oklahoma City Area)
- Galyn Minkel (Bemidji Area)
- Angela Pratt (Nashville Area)
- Chief William Smith (Alaska Area)
- Eugene "Geno" Talas (Phoenix Area)
- Tewa "Ted" Tenorio (California Area)
- Sonya M. Tetnowski (Urban Indian Health Organization)
- Alfred "Fred" Urbina (Tucson Area) and
- James Zwierlein (Navajo Area).



Manaja Hill Standing Rock Sioux Tribe









Addressing food insecurity needs for veterans, service members, and their families, and their caregivers

OPERATION CHOW LINE

Meal is free for service members, veterans, their families and caregivers

Wagner, SD

Thursday, October 14, 2021
American Legion
Resource Fair 10am-1:30pm
Meal 11am-1:30pm
121 2nd St. SW

For more information contact: Jill Baker, CAV Chair

Jill Baker, CAV Chair 605-370-9898

Paul Miller, CAV Vice-Chair Volunteers of America 605-941-7960 Pat Herman, CAV Treasurer Center for Disabilities 605-357-1577

All veteran service organizations, auxiliaries, and local partners in the area are welcome to set up a resource booth.



We are proud to be a BWF local Partner. Our thanks to the Bob Woodruff Foundation and Craig Newmark Philanthropies for this funding to help us combat food insecurity among service members, veterans, their families and their caregivers.

Our special thanks to the DAV Arthur H. Muchow Chapter No. 1 for providing funding to help us combat food insecurity among South Dakota's service members, veterans, their families, and their caregivers.

















PHEASANT HUNT

OCTOBER 21-23, 2021

EXTREME PHEASANT OUTFITTERS **37821 234TH ST, WESSINGTON SPRINGS, SD 57382**

OCTOBER 21 (Group 1) OCTOBER 22 (Group 2)

8:00am Arrival/Check-in 9:00am Breakfast/Safety Brief 10:00am Hunt/Lunch/Hunt 5:00pm Social Hour 6:00pm Dinner

8:00am Arrival/Check-in 9:00am Breakfast/Safety Brief 10:00am Hunt/Lunch/Hunt 5:00pm Social Hour 6:00pm Dinner

OCTOBER 22

OCTOBER 23 8:00am Breakfast and Departure 8:00am Breakfast and Departure

Participant is responsible for transportation to the lodge and hunting license. All meals, ammunition and guided hunt are provided by Warriors Never Give Up.

> REGISTER TODAY info@warriorsnevergiveup.org

Sponsored by Johnstone Supply



HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING

HEALING HEREOS THROUGH OUTDOOR ADVENTURES



Attention Veterans: It's That Time Protect Yourself With A FLU Shot

Sioux Falls VA Medical Center Drive-Thru Flu Vaccine

Drive-Thru Flu Vaccine Clinics Will Be Offered On:

9/22/2021	WEDNESDAY	8:00 a.m6:00 p.m.
10/02/2021	SATURDAY	8:00 a.m6:00 p.m.
10/08/2021	FRIDAY	8:00 a.m6:00 p.m.
10/13/2021	WEDNESDAY	8:00 a.m4:00 p.m.
10/19/21	TUESDAY	8:00 a.m4:00 p.m.
10/28/21	THURSDAY	8:00 a.m4:00 p.m.

Veterans attending the drive thru clinic will need to enter off 26th street and will exit out the 22nd Street exit.

All Veterans receiving a vaccination via drive-up need to wear a mask.



FREE EVENT

South Dakota Women Veterans Alliance Event

Saturday October 16th

Event Schedule

9:00am-10:00am - Registration & Vendor Booths

10:30am-12:00pm - Veteran Leadership Panel

12:00pm-12:30pm - Break & Vendors

12:30pm-2:00pm - Carey Lohrenz Virtual Keynote Speech & Lunch

2:00pm - Break & Vendors

2:00pm-3:00pm - Shooting Range Activity*



^{**}First 500 registrants receive a signed copy of Carey Lohrenz's book!



Carey Lohrenz- The First Female F-14 Tomcat Fighter Pilot in the U.S. Navy

FREE Book from Carey Lohrenz!

October 16, 2021—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance
1600 W. Russell Street—Sioux Falls, SD 57104
Questions: SDWOMENVETERANSALLIANCE@GMAIL.COM

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 8—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CPT Elmer Rusch—SDSU DuPuy Military Hall (1150 Campanile Avenue)—Brookings—11:00 am (CT)

Oct 9 - Midwest Honor Flight - Mission 8

Oct 9—Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—8:45 pm (CT)

Doors Open at 7:00 pm (CT)

Oct 9—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game—Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)

Oct 11—State Offices Closed

Oct 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT William Christensen—American Legion Post 194 (221 W. Main Street)—Parkston—1:00 pm (CT)

Oct 16—Women Veterans Alliance Event—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

Oct 16—Gallantly Forward 2021 Gala—The Monument—Lacroix Hall—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)

Oct 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—SD Military Heritage Alliance Building (1600 W. Russell)— Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)

Oct 23—Midwest Honor Flight Hangar Dance at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Oct 27—Veterans Stand Down—Old High School Gym (301 S. Van Buren)—Winner—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

Nov 11—State Offices Closed

Nov 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Gregory Wagner—Hanson High School (600 Juniper Street)—Alexandria—10:00 am (CT)

Nov 13—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center (1401 Lazelle Street)—12:00—3:00 pm (MT)

Nov 25-26—State Offices Closed

Dec 7—Governor's Budget Address

Dec 18—Wreaths Across America—South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Dec 24—State Offices Closed

Dec 31—State Offices Closed

2022

Jan 10—POW/MIA Chair of Honor Dedication—State Capitol—2:00 pm (CT)

Jan 11—Governor's State of the State Address

Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride

Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military https://military.sd.gov/

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs https://vetaffairs.sd.gov

Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605-773-8242

E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

